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Feature Focus - June 2012



Staff members at the SEC offices are so excited about this year's Annual Meeting! To prepare for the upcoming meeting we asked our featured speakers, Holly MillerShank and Elizabeth Clement, to say a word or two about what it means to create a culture of call.

Holly says "In order to successfully create a culture of call in our congregations we need to first free ourselves of our stereotypes of ministry and ministers. God is able to imagine all things, we too need to free ourselves to imagine ways in which the gifts and talents of people from a variety of life-perspectives can enhance the work of the church. Through God all things are indeed possible, including the opening of our own hearts and minds to see mission and ministry in new ways, and risk calling forth both expected and unexpected people into service for God's church."

Elizabeth offers a garden scene to spark our imaginations as we consider what it takes to cultivate church leaders.

"My neighbor, Mrs. Latimore, has a green thumb and such a lovely garden. Earlier this Spring, when I said how beautiful everything was coming up, she wailed, "But I forgot to plant my bulbs last October. There will be no tulips for Easter!" Clearly, many other things had been done, but what is not planted does not grow.

The role of the congregations and its members to developing leaders for the church is like the garden and Mrs. L to her (missing) tulips. Where there is a lively interplay of caring relationships and "tending" over time, our purposed effort in one season brings new life and possibility in another—or not.

Local churches that are cultures of call notice, name and nurture God's call. They mimic the rhythms of cultivation in their lives together—like a community garden—preparing the ground, planting seeds, and tending to each other's growth in faith and life. They pay attention to the people God calls (all), they create opportunities to reflect on each one's gifts and how God summons them, and they walk together as they listen for and move toward faithful response.

Churches that are like well-oiled machines with many active parts and programs doing this and that may not cultivate

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call. A culture of call is more like a working farm, with people depending on each other for nourishing relationships, growing together in God’s purposes. In a church where Christians hope to serve God and their neighbors, cultivation never stops.

When Jesus cultivated the ones he expected to lead his followers after he was gone, his approach took the rhythm of a long, slow walk with friends, in a conversation about what mattered in the Reign of God, teaching and learning and improvising together as they faced the realities of life on their way. And it worked. What if our churches took up the careful tending that promises blooms in a season yet to come? It sounds odd and unrealistic. But, as Paul assured the earliest church, some will plant and others will water, and God will give the increase. (1 Cor 3:6) Thanks be to God.

The [online registration link](#) is now available for the 2012 Annual Meeting. Annual Reports will be posted on or around June 1, 2012.

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